**DOCUMENT RESUME**

ED 148 287 HE 009 562

AUTHOR Sinclair, Phillip A.
TITLE The Proof of the Pudding: When You're Eyeball-to-Eyeball with Students.
PUB DATE [77]
NOTE 18p.; For related document see HE 009 561 ; Best copy available

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Class Management; Classroom Communication; *College Faculty; College Instruction; College Students; *Communication Skills; *Effective Teaching; Higher Education; Humor; Interpersonal Relationship; *Student Motivation; *Student Teacher Relationship; Teacher Characteristics; *Teacher Improvement; Teacher Influence; Time Factors (Learning)

ABSTRACT

Suggestions for communicating and therefore teaching college students effectively are put forth. Emphasis is on lively interactions between students and teachers, with additional focus on the instructor's need to understand student needs both in the classroom and after graduation. Specific methods are illustrated with classroom examples for encouraging student attention, time management, and motivation. Imagination and humor are considered important assets. (LBH)

**********
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. Nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *
**********

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Phillip A Sinclair

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

ED148287

HE009562

# The PROOF OF THE PUDDING

## When You're Eyeball-to-eyeball with Students

by

PHILLIP A. SINCLAIR
Professor
Community & Technical College
The University of Toledo

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

An article previously presented to the public by this author discussed the need for streamlined teacher training if education is to be made more lively and palatable. It was stated by the writer (and supported through a number of analogous observations by eminent educators) that many instructors simply do not get their ideas across to the student body, since their very methods of teaching are boring and soporific. Several suggestions were made on how to improve matters in this respect. In the words of noted critic, the situation can be described as follows:

> Perhaps the most widespread current indictment of Higher Education is that of its alleged impersonality. Specifically, the criticism is that faculty members neglect students and tend to have no vital personal contact with them.[1]

The present article shows what to do and how to teach when eyeball-to-eyeball with students. How can the instructor

---

[1]Ohmer Milton, "The Changing Nature of Instruction," Journal of Research and Development in Education, V. 6, No. 2, Winter, 1973, p. 117.

improve his personality and force himself to be overcome his old-fogey viewpoints if he (or she) wants to be counted in and listened to. The best teacher of English Composition will be unable to show his pupils how to write a good, strong letter for the purpose of collecting a debt, if he does not heed the basic pointers outlined in the following paragraphs.

The instructor must honestly ask himself if he would like to sit through a series of lessons in which dry facts are lectured about in a montonour way, or whether he would not prefer a lively session including discussion, competions, skits and other diversified ways to enliven education and to make it relevant to our present-day world. Here are some of the most vital points to be kept in mind and assimilated by every well-intentioned instructor:

Students are notoriously conscious of time required to complete text and written assignments. This mental set comes about owing to: (a) an actual excessive workload due to an over-communicated society and classroom, and (b) the fact that some students do work 40 hours per week and perhaps more, or if they are supported by enough dollars, and an outside job is not required, they still attach greater importance to play, beer drinking, and socializing than do adults. Their values are normally not those of the Instructor, unless highly motivated. Students are persons in their own right; our teachers should respect them as such, not as the dunces some Instructors make

them appear. Consequently, the grapevine does carry sharp evaluations of the academic work required. One college has an Instructor who's evaluated this way: "Demands a lot of work, but teaches you how to organize your time, how to study, and guarantees a high grade if you follow his instructions. If you can't, don't take his course. Time is not a factor in his course if you're well organized." He guarantees a high grade? Yes, indeed he does.

This evaluation may have more complimentary tone to it than one imagines. This Instructor is helpful, though demanding. In sum, he understands needs of students, both in the classroom and after graduation. He prepares students for the ultimate, a job, by organizing their time as well as equipping them with pertinent knowledge. His instruction is bi-functional. He knows students' weaknesses and contributes to strengthening them. And he helps them get their skills to an employer. Incidentally, the student's opinion about his teacher is not less important for a good relationship than the Instructor's view of each pupil.

> The characteristics of good teaching that colleagues can judge are essential ones but not sufficient, for they tell us nothing of what transpires within the classroom. Much published work has established the reliability and some types of validity of student evaluations of teaching.[2]

---

[2]Grace French-Lazovik, "Evaluation of College Teaching," Association of American Colleges, February 1, 1977, p. 6.

This Instructor pays attention to the materialistic society in which we live, yet he teaches liberal arts subjects. A job, money, and progress on that job seem the ultimate to most students today. In this regard he understands modern youth. He serves as a professional.

One of the great problems today is the situation as noted by Jacques Barzun: Not enough natural teachers are born and available to teach. In the absence of such true transferers of knowledge, as well as suitable technological substitutes, education is forced to develop what is available." Any Instructor today can start to improve his transfer ability by paying attention to modest student wishes. Colleges of Education can incorporate student wants into their courses teaching prospective teachers how to teach.[3]

The individual Instructor can realize that "speaking effectively" means many things, not just a mellifluous voice. It includes attitude, self-confidence, mental sets, determination, hours of practice, It's no longer enough to be equipped with vast training and comprehension of a narrow field of understanding. You are what you are. Your life may glide serenly between the walls of home, library, grocery store, and a college office. But that specific daily activity, instructing impressionable young people, is more important than ever. Your effort of

---

[3]For current examples of what some colleges are doing, see "A is for Acting," Newsweek, March 8th, 1976, p. 58. Also, "Dynamiting Language," Time, August 16th, 1976, p. 56.

inspiring and moulding some 100 youths per quarter can be more influential, or perhaps futile, than it ever was. "Dud" instructing leaves greater wreckage. Inborn personality has little to do with it; it's the way you project yourself to others, whether you care, and then showing you care.

It means discarding old attitudes like: "Let 'em dig it out for themselves," and substituting: "Now, let's cover this in class, or, in my office later today." Speaking effectively, influencing lives, and caring means getting rid of negatives in your own self. Are you envious of students? Kick this. Are you unimaginative? You can develop imagination. Are you dishrag, limp and colorless in classroom projection? You can stand in front of your hallway mirror and develop enthusiasm for your subject and a well-rounded projection of it. Add enthusiasm to your bag. It's an absolute essential in any classroom appearance. Bounce into the room: "Good morning, everybody!" If you get little response, sigh good naturedly: "Dead, dead, dead!" If you're the listless type, without the flashing flame of self-confidence, students' responses will be the same way. Enthusiasm inspires. Make this basic rule work for you. Incidentally, enthusiasm should be used not only to evoke the right answers, but to elicit relevant questions. This is a very important point; according to Kelly,

> Do not expect the student to recite. Expect him to question, to draw comparisons, to pose problems for the instructor and his fellow students. "Questions. . .are the best single means of communication from students in instructor." A better device than a pop quiz is to ask the class to submit two or three questions to be discussed in class. The questions provide both an indication of student comprehension of the subject and feedback of various sorts to the instructor.[4]

Accompanying this enthusiasm, you can use imagination. The impression you make in a classroom depends on such an ability and the way you use it. What is imagination? Simply put: Knowing how to clothe a situation with color. It frequently involves building on what students may do, or don't do. Sometimes a little joke or an invented anecdote may help to make an outsider part of the group, and bring him back into the circle. Pointing at an unresponsive student, you could tie him in with a fictitious little story like this:

> Speaking of Japanese soldiers found on lonely Pacific islands after 20 years! Mr. Moore, there in the back row, tells me he was stranded on such an island once. Man, was he lonely! When the Navy finally rescued him, he introduced the rescue party to his wife, a 20-ft. tree named Bernice!

After the first test, or the first several weeks, an Instructor can tell what special arrangements must be made for the lower fourth of his class. You've probably included in your syllabus a sheet on <u>how to study</u> and a sheet showing students <u>how</u>

---

[4]Samuel P. Kelly, "Effective College Teaching Techniques," <u>Improving College and University Teaching</u>, V. 21, N. 3, Summer 1973, p. 230.

to manage their time. Now comes a personal conference with each student in that lower fourth of the class. Whether they know it or not, assume each student is looking to you for help with his problems. He wants you to be a problem-solver; a wretched home life and a 40-hour-a-week job for working their way thru college are not conducive to enthusiastic study. But your interest makes it easier. If you're going to be more than a lecturer, you must decide to be a problem-solver, a creative Instructor who urges allocation of hours for study, who urges new habits, new attitudes, new results. Each student will have a new level of wonderment; each will express peculiarities, possibly resentment. Each is different, each needs your dedication to transferring knowledge and generating willing reception and retention. Instructing is more than standing in front of a class and offering facts and figures. It truly is problem-solving. Your office hours are for this specific purpose, an on-going exercise in solving difficulties.

One Instructor reported having had among his students a young black, quite handsome, tall and athletic, but evidently unwilling to take notes, remain alert in the classroom, and study at home. This Instructor learned by accident he was working for the Champion Spark Plug Company, and was interested in all phases of racing. The Instructor drew on one of his boyhood acquaintances, a nationally known race car driver. He had him detour to visit him, and during the visit brought the friend and the young black student together. After lunch in the college cafeteria, the

driver remarked that one of the influences in his life had been three years of college; he regretted he hadn't gone on to graduate. He autographed a copy of The Racers, and gave it to the young student. Since then the young man has been more responsive, and is struggling with new attitudes and habits.

This incident describes more than just a stunt. It shows that a dedicated Instructor, truly caring, can change attitudes and habits by calling on his own resources. This is not a wasted effort. He was talking to the student in the only language he understands. Can such an event be staged for every student in the customary lower one-fourth of any class? Possibly not. But the effort is worth it. This incident also serves to illustrate the fact that good Instructors can never be replaced by teaching machines or robots. In the words of two experts:

> The TEACHERS cannot be replaced by a module. They must still teach. The module is merely a vehicle to help teachers do a better job of providing for individual differences. Therefore, frequent contact with teachers and peers must be built into the program so that it will not be dehumanized.[5]

Another Instructor passes out green-and-gold membership cards in The Limerick Society of America with students' names typed on each one and a number indicating official enrollment. He then regales his classes with the history of the limerick, with

---

[5]Sophia Brotherton and Ellen Peete, "Competency Based Instruction in Teaching Reading and Language Arts," p. 54.

ample examples, and has students in a hilariously receptive mood for the more serious aspects of his subject.

One Professor asks each of 25 students in any new class to state his first name, the entire class pronouncing each announced name in cumulative succession. This compels remembering 25 names at the end of this drill. At end of the exercise the classusually is relaxed, ready to know one another.

As for printed pass-out sheets and television programs, no matter how well prepared and put together, they can never take the place of a personal, knowledgeable, human presentation. Remember, a printed piece of paper can't breathe warmth and vigor into a student. A student can't ask questions of such a piece or of a television monitor. You have a priceless asset to work with: your verbal imagination. Use it. The printed piece can be left behind to reinforce your presentation.

Upon meeting a class for the first time, there's a standard procedure. Put your name and initials on the front board, pass out the syllabus and any supplemental material. But, your appearance and bearing are more important. Establish eye contact at once. Acknowledge any previous students by name. If a small class, you may want to go round and shake each student's hand, sounding off his name. Tell each your're delighted he's here, or that you've been looking forward to meeting him. Do not encumber yourself with coat or hat. Carrying these items gives the impression of wanting to cut short the period or make

a quick getaway. Observe the State fire marshall's order: don't smoke, don't bring in food or drink. Get the entire class to agree with you three times. This is accomplished in any number of ways: "Well, what a good looking class!" Or: ". . .a fine fall day to start an important quarter (or course)." Or: ". . .great game Fydrych pitched last night, wasn't it?" Or: "Hi, everybody! Are we all in the right place? Mathematics 301?" Does it matter whether a teacher cares? It sure does. At the risk of being repetitive, let us quote S. E. Ericksen:

> An instructor who does not enjoy teaching and who has no particular interest in his class as individuals will very likely not be well received by the students. If he does not care, neither do the students, regardless of his teaching style. The same effect is generated by those professors whose primary interest is research rather than teaching and who look on their classes as forced obligations. They hope students will not bother them and will leave them free to pursue the library or laboratory projects that are presumed to bring higher status.[6]

Since you're the fountainhead, because you're prepared, knowledgeable, more experience, you can guide students: "Let me have your thinking so we can work out an answer together." This establishes a co-operative project. Knowing what you yourself would want, after all your undergraduate and graduate anguish, you reverse roles and being to satisfy and entertain students. By truly knowing, and caring, you instinctively offer what students

---

[6]S. E. Ericksen, "Earning and Learning," Effective College Teaching, William H. Morris, ed. (Washington, D.C.: American Council on Education, 1970), p. 3.

are looking for.

And so, during the quarter, you're seeking favorable exposure to each student as many times as possible. You do remember names. You remain certain that what you do and say is in good taste, with no suggestion of force or threats. You keep strict office hours. Students are somewhat like customers; it's fatal to let them carry away disappointment. Toward this end, check up in the hallways occasionally with students: "Mr. Jones, how's this course going for you?" Or: "Ms. Smith, are you enjoying this course?" In keeping students aware of you, you're showing geniume concern to prevent loss of interest in favor of a job's demands, sports, indolence, etc. Tell students to telephone you at home: "I'd rather have you telephone me than just sit wondering what to do!" There's a difference between favorable exposure and harrassment, but when you approach it the right way, students become favorably aware of your existence, and aren't annoyed by your presence, demands, and dynamics. Remember: You must avoid being a perpetual symbol of the "establishment" in their eyes.

> As a symbolic representative of privilege, a professor necessarily perpetuates "establishment" culture. Hence the proposal to shift the choice of subject matter and texts to the students, who represent the "underclass" in the university. A group of students imposing its own values symbolizes, in this shadow politics, the accession to power and responsibility of the dispossessed of the earth.[7]

---

[7]Peter Shaw, "The Poltics of Reform in Higher Education," College English, V. 33, N. 3, December 1971, p. 299.

The follow-up is part of exposure. Take time to write the young woman who's missed 2-3 class sessions: "Dear Ms. Jones: I do hope you'll be back with the class shortly; we've missed you." Do telephone the residence of a student who's been excessively often absent; both he and his parents will be surprised and pleased.

Perseverance. Keep it up.

Offer the laggards 15-minute coaching periods to help them get through the course. Insist each student become productive by learning how to spend his share of time to best advantage. Emphasize that managing time is a skill. It means thinking in small portions integrated into a time unit. "That's why, Mr. Green, I suggested 15-minute coaching sessions for you each day." Then check up on the student's utilization of time; do this in class, assuming you can't go into a dorm or private resident to check during personal hours. Does he know how to take notes? Is he doing so?

The professional Instructor is many things: consultant, educator, supplier of advanced thoughts useful on the job and in developing life, leader into untrodden areas. Such a professional knows he must look to himself for rewards, rewards other than just money. He must look to his own pervormance for satisfaction, to his own resources for personal development. The professional gives of himself in many respects, especially since truth comes from many directions. In brief, he must be an integral part of

his community, and the outward influences of 25 students today and tomorrow in any community are more significant than any teacher imagines. The more meaningful and useful his contributions to students, the greater his contribution to a doubting society. The professional Instructor is in a pivotal position; he can shape and mould as no one else can do. His contribution is paramount for tomorrow's society, whatever it will become. With perseverance, humor imagination, and creative performance, the professional can buy influence today, knowing it may be weeks, months, perhaps years before his contribution is fully viewed.

But if that professional has done his work well, when the time comes, he'll be in students' minds, even at their sides.

That's what makes a professional among Instructors.

For the umpteenth time, remember: You do not wnat to be in their minds as a dull lecturer, but as a lively Instructor and friend. Avoid billing the teacher as the center of the universe. Make the students feel that tings evolve around their problems.

> In the period following World War II, interest burgeoned in those kinds of discussion methods which give great emphasis to student responsibility. While this interest waned during the 1950's, it revived in the late 1960's and a great many teachers tried methods in which the teacher's traditional role as an authority was altered. T-group or encounter group techniques were incorporated into many courses.[8]

---

[8]"Student--Vs. Instructor-Centered Teaching," Improving Teaching Effectiveness, No. 25, p. 9.

Recapitulating how an Instructor can determine if he (or she) is "getting" through, what he can do if it appears that he is falling short of this primary objective, here is what he can do to improve his personality:

BASIC ATTRIBUTES OF
ANY CLASSROOM PRESENTATION . . .

From close study of students and their reaction to his own classroom performance, an Instructor can easily confirm that the following characteristics of his teaching ability are desirable:

1. RELEVANCE . . . a Professor is obliged to satisfy students' needs, both latent and immediate, such as improvement on the job or in their environment. This involves recognition; students may need what an Instructor urges, but don't recognize it, or realize it.

2. IMMEDIACY . . . this concerns the degree to which the Instructor's language, images, thoughts, similes, metaphors, verbs, idioms, etc. are similar to those of students. Normally, a college Instructor is confronted with 20-year old students interested in booze, sex, food, clothing, special hobbies, and then -- education. He generally seeks to overcome a generation gap, he really wants to establish communication.

3. REALISM . . . this concerns an Instructor's presentation incorporating material drawn from the culture and environment from which students come. Is he entertaining? Relaxed?

Inspirational? As a rule, natural, unrehearsed speech is desirable, but infrequently achieved. Usable material drawn from the world around students should be sought.

4. ATTENTION SPAN . . . students, as well as adults, have notoriously short attention spans. Instructors must shift gears frequently, using shouts, whipers, dramatic pauses, props, visual aids, etc. to compete with this limitation.

5. SENSITIVITY . . . Teachers frequently think that students must rise to the Instructor's own level. Good teaching turns this around and accounts for students' attitudes, past conditioning, and resistance. Each Instructor should recognize he must overcome a standard resistance factor of about 30-40%, dependent on such variables as ethnic origin, success or failure in high school, parental attitudes, etc. He attempts to overcome this built-in factor with such devices as: respect, fostering self-esteem, the hand-in-hand approach instead of that gesture becoming adversary or a suppresor; freedom of expression, and cooperative attitude ("See me anytime; I'm always eager to help!").

6. IMPACT . . . an Instructor may have the most valuable message in the world, but he has got to get it into students' minds. Learning is directly dependent on the impact of his delivery, the manner in which he presents that message. This is achieved largely through presence. A weak classroom presence presumably will not have much impact. A strong presence, bent

on reinforcing his message and sounding natural yet convincing, will make that impact.

There are few empirical studies on these variables. However, there is one general conclusion, seemingly self-evident and acceptable to most faculty members. It confirms that an interesting Instructor will generate greater interest than an uninteresting personality. It sounds like a truism, but it represents an important bit of wisdom. Instructors can normally proceed with this concept, the basic plank in the bridge they are to build between themselves and students.

And keeping the need for this plank foremost in mind, this is what makes a truly professional Instructor, and distinguishes such a professional from the amatuer and the substitute teacher.

In conclusion, let me quote a highly relevant passage.

> It has been said, "An educated man knows what he is doing." That simple statement implies that an educated person not only does the "right things" but that he or she knows why those things are being done. Options have been considered, plans have been laid, and a conscious choice has been made. Unfortunately, too many college teachers don't know (in this sense) what they are doing, i.e., their activity in the classroom is governed by convention rather than conscious choice.[9]

---

[9]Davis, "Strategy 1: Employing Instructional Systems," Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1976. p. 15.

# BIBLIOGRAPHY

"A is for Acting," Newsweek. March 8th, 1976. Also, "Dynamiting Language," Time. August 16th, 1976.

Brotherton, Sophia and Ellen Peete. "Competency Based Instruction in Teaching Reading and Lanugage Arts,"

Davis, James R."Strategy 1: Employing Instructional Systems," Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1976.

Ericksen, S. E. "Earning and Learning," Effective College Teaching. William H. Morris, ed. Washington, D.C.: American Council on Education, 1970.

French-Lazovik, Grace. "Evaluation of College Teaching," Association of American Colleges. February 1, 1977.

Kelly, Samuel P. "Effective College Teaching Techniques," Improving College and University Teaching. V. 21. N. 3. Summer 1973, pp. 229-232.

Milton, Ohmer. "The Changing Nature of Instruction," Journal of Research and Development in Education. V. 6. N. 2. Winter 1973, pp. 115-125.

Shaw, Peter, "The Politics of Reform in Higher Education," College English. V. 33. N. 3. December 1971, pp. 294-303.

"Student--Vs. Instructor-Centered Teaching," Improving Teaching Effectiveness. N. 25, p. 9.